

About the Artist: Lisa Reihana

Through a pioneering practice combining photography, video, and installation, Lisa Reihana has achieved what most artists only ever dream about: she makes a full-time living from her art. Of Māori Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Tū, and Ngāti Hine descent, she has had her work exhibited in museums, art galleries, and art festivals around the world, including the Auckland Art Gallery, Brooklyn Museum, University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Queensland, October Gallery in London, Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center in New Caledonia, and Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington.



PHOTO BY MOANA NEPIA

In 2017, Reihana represents Aotearoa/New Zealand at the Venice Biennale with *Emissaries*, which includes *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, a 32-minute and 23-meter-long video projection inspired by Josef Dufour's 1804 French scenic wallpaper *Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique* (<http://www.inpursuitofvenus.com>) Utilizing green-screen technology to superimpose performers against a back-drop based on Dufour's whimsical Tahitian landscape, Reihana's vignettes explore meetings between Polynesian ancestors and early European explorers. Historic characters such as Captain James Cook present glimpses into some of the darker "infected" moments of those encounters and also into the scientific motives for European expeditions alluded to in the title. Monumental in scale, this work follows similarly striking presentations in Venice by other Māori artists such as Michael Parekowhai, Rachael Rakena, and Brett Graham.

Stills from *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* appear in this issue along with images from Reihana's earlier video and photographic work. Her philosophy is "making" rather than "taking," with a long-standing emphasis on portraiture photographs and historical and ancestral narratives. The collaborative nature of Reihana's practice is made possible with the help of her family, numerous friends, and fellow artists.

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The art featured in this issue can be viewed in full color in the online versions.



in Pursuit of Venus [infected] (detail 1), by Lisa Reihana, 2015.
HD video, color, sound, 32 min.

Vignettes in *iPOVi*, including the tattooing of a European sailor, reconstruct actual and imaginary encounters between indigenous Pacific Islanders and early European explorers. As Anne Salmond has suggested, such meetings were “sometimes explosive and destructive (‘infected’), sometimes genial and creative . . . world-shifting encounters” (quoted in the exhibition catalog *Lisa Reihana: In Pursuit of Venus*, edited by Rhana Devenport and Clare McIntosh [2015, 3]).



Diva, by Lisa Reihana, 2007.

Photographic print on aluminum, 2000 x 1200 mm,
from *Digital Marae*.

Diva features among a collection of photographic representations of atua (ancestral deities) and contemporary icons in Reihana's ongoing *Digital Marae* installation, which transforms gallery spaces to resemble wharenui (meeting houses) using digital imagery in place of wooden carvings and woven panels.



Dandy, by Lisa Reihana, 2007.

Photographic print on aluminum, 2000 x 1200 mm,
from *Digital Marae*.

Countering stereotypical depictions of Māori masculinity, strength, and prowess that focus on physical accomplishments on the battlefield or rugby playgrounds, Reihana's *Dandy*, with full-face moko (tattoo) and Victorian attire, asserts a quietly confident sense of elegance and poise.



Hinepukohurangi, by Lisa Reihana, 2001.

Photographic print on aluminum, 2000 x 1000 mm,
from *Digital Marae*.

Described as “Children of the Mist,” Ngāi Tūhoe people from Aotearoa trace their ancestry from Hinepukohurangi, the mist that surrounds their mountains and cloaks their valleys.



Maui, by Lisa Reihana, 2007.

Photographic print on aluminum, 2000 x 1200 mm. From *Digital Marae*.

The ancestral demigod Maui features in creation stories across the Pacific as a creative innovator, trickster, and instigator of change. Having hauled new lands up from the ocean floor, slowed down the sun, and sourced the secret of fire, he is depicted in *Digital Marae* as surfing a wave toward us. Maui role model for the power of transformative thinking.



Mahuika, by Lisa Reihana, 2001.

Photographic print on aluminum, 2000 x 1200 mm, from *Digital Marae*.

Māori ancestral narratives depict Mahuika as guardian, atua (ancestral deity), or goddess of fire. Having been tricked into giving all but one of her fingernails and toenails to Maui so he could carry home the secret of fire, she grew angry and chased him. Maui turned into a bird and called to Tawhirimatea (atua of wind) for help. As the heavy rains poured down, Mahuika threw her last fingernail into the forest. Trees such as tōtara, mahoe, patete, pukatea, and kaikōmako have been regarded ever since as guardian trees of fire.



Vanessa, by Lisa Reihana, 2003.

Laser-etched granite, 603 mm × 400 mm × 15 mm.

Vanessa is one of six images in *Granite Portraits*, a series derived from the multimedia work *Native Portraits n. 19897*, which was created for the opening of Te Papa Tongarewa in 1997.



Tai Whetuki—House of Death, by Lisa Reihana, 2014.

Ultra HD video, single channel, sound, 14 min.

Photograph by Kallan Macleod.

Created for the 2015 Auckland Arts Festival, this work dramatically activates knowledge about Pacific mourning practices, Hinenuitepo (Māori goddess of death), and the heva tūpāpa‘u (Tahitian chief mourner’s costume). The mourner’s costume was created with Bob Buck for *Tai Whetuki* and Steven Ball for *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* after drawings by Tupaia from 1789 and collection items in Te Papa Tongarewa, the National Museum of New Zealand.



in Pursuit of Venus [infected] (detail 2), by Lisa Reihana, 2015.
HD digital video, color, sound, 32 min.

Sean Mallon suggests that the inclusion of the Tahitian chief mourner character in *iPOVi* has significance as a symbol of death and it “reminds us of—and perhaps mourns—other losses in the wake of European settlement and colonization” (quoted in the exhibition catalog *Lisa Reihana: In Pursuit of Venus*, edited by Rhana Devenport and Clare McIntosh [2015, 66]).